

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY QUITO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PORG, BL

SUBJ: BANZER MARCH 21 INTERVIEW

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT HUGO BANZER, IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW MARCH 21 WITH THE LA PAZ MORNING DAILY, EL DIARIO, RESPONDED TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS ON A FUTURE OPENING OF POLITICAL AND LABOR UNION ACTIVITIES, PRESIDENT CARTER'S HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVES, THE ANDEAN PACT, AND OTHER SUBJECTS. HE SAID THAT WHILE MANY OF THE PREREQUISITES FOR THE OPENING OF POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITIES IN BOLIVIA ALREADY HAVE BEEN MET, THE CONDITIONS ARE STILL NOT OPTIMUM AND THE PARTIES WILL REMAIN IN RECESS. HE ADDED THAT LABOR UNIONS, PROVIDED THEY REMAIN APOLITICAL, COULD REOPEN ACTIVITIES BEFORE PARTIES. HE WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT THE COUNTRY WOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO THE UNSTABLE POLITICAL SITUATION PRIOR TO AUGUST 1971. BANZER IMPLIED THAT BOLIVIA HAD NOT BEEN PRESSURED BY THE USG TO MOVE TOWARDS DEMOCRATIZATION AND SAID THAT BOLIVIA WOULD NOT PERMIT EXTERNAL PRESSURES OVER QUESTIONS

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OF ITS "EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTION." HIS MESSAGE SEEMS MAINLY DIRECTED TO THE BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES AND THE USG, REAFFIRMING THAT THE NATION MUST MOVE STEADILY BUT CAUTIOUSLY TOWARDS A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PRESIDENT WAS ASKED A SERIES OF QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MAIN LINES OF BOLIVIA'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES AND ITS RELATIONS

WITH THE THIRD WORLD, ABOUT BRIBES FROM MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS, AND POSSIBLE BOLIVIAN DEPARTURE FROM THE ANDEAN PACT. FINALLY HE WAS ASKED ABOUT QUOTE THE PRESSURE WHICH PRESIDENT CARTER IS EXERCISING ON COUNTRIES WITH MILITARY REGIMES WHERE HE IS LIMITING ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. DOES THERE EXIST OR DID THERE EXIST PRESSURES FROM THE US THAT THE COUNTRY (BOLIVIA) BECOME DEMOCRATIC? UNQUOTE.

3. IN RESPONSE PRESIDENT BANZER REAFFIRMED GOB INTENT TO STAY WITH THE ANDEAN PACT AS LONG AS BOLIVIA'S RIGHTS THEREIN ARE RESPECTED. HE CONDEMNED BRIBES FROM MULTINATIONALS BUT NOTED THAT IRRESPONSIBLE JOURNALISTS HAD UNJUSTLY LIBELLED SOME PEOPLE, SUCH AS VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ. BANZER ALSO CLAIMED GOB AUTHORITIES WERE DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS AGAINST EXTREMISTS WHO PROPOSED VIOLENT AND ARBITRARY CHANGE. BANZER SAID THE GOB COULD NOT TAKE A POSITION ON ALLEGED USG PRESSURES AGAINST OTHER GOVERNMENTS. TO DO SO, HE SAID, WOULD BE AN IMPERMISSIBLE INTERVENTION INTO AFFAIRS WHICH DO NOT CONCERN HIM. HOWEVER, BOLIVIA AS A SOVEREIGN AND AUTONOMOUS COUNTRY WOULD NOT PERMIT ANY KIND OF PRESSURE OVER QUESTIONS OF ITS EXCLUSIVE COMPETENCE.

4. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT'S RESPONSES SEEMED ADDRESSED TO AT LEAST FOUR AUDIENCES - THE ARMED FORCES; THE UNIONS, POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE USG. BANZER IS MAINTAINING THE POSITION THAT BOLIVIA WILL RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL RULE AND THAT LABOR UNIONS WILL BE PERMITTED SOME AUTONOMY PERHAPS BEFORE POLITICAL PARTIES. HIS MESSAGE TO THE USG IS MORE AMBIVALENT. BANZER MADE NO DIRECT COMMENT ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS (ALTHOUGH HE EARLIER HAD SUPPORTED PRESIDENT CARTER'S GENERAL POSITION (SEE LA PAZ 1644). BANZER IMPLIED (CORRECTLY) THAT BOLIVIA HAD NOT RECEIVED PRESSURE FROM LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE USG TO MOVE FASTER TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES, BUT HIS CAREFULLY CHOSEN WORDS DEFENDING SOVEREIGNTY IN AREAS OF BOLIVIA'S EXCLUSIVE COMPETENCE LEAVES HIM SOME FLEXIBILITY. WHILE THE GOB'S PROMISES TO MOVE TOWARDS INSTITUTIONALIZATION STARTED BEFORE PRESIDENT CARTER'S ELECTION PROGRESS IN THIS DIRECTION HAS CERTAINLY NOT BEEN SLOWED BY GOB READING OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S SPEECHES FAVORING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. DESPITE PRESIDENT BANZER'S DISCLAIMERS OF HAVING RECEIVED USG PRESSURES, HIS MESSAGE TO THE BOLIVIAN MILITARY SEEMS TO BE THAT CONSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE COUNTRY IS AN IRREVERSIBLE PROCESS. END COMMENT. STEDMAN

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